



Mily Treviño-Sauceda helps female farmworkers find their voices when they're sexually harassed

Learning to Fight Back

"We're showing that farmworker women are not invisible," says Treviño-Sauceda (front), with sexual assault victim Olivia Tamayo.

As a 16-year-old migrant farmworker in the fields of Southern California, Mily Treviño-Sauceda would stand at the top of the ladder—to avoid the unwanted groping of coworkers who stalked her in the isolated groves where she worked. Once, carrying an apron full of lemons while trying to get away from a tractor driver, she fell, permanently injuring her lower back. Telling no one, she stopped wearing makeup to try to make herself unattractive. "I felt it was

my fault," she says.

Today, at 47, Treviño-Sauceda is helping female workers fight the largely undocumented problem of sexual harassment in the fields. Through Organización en California de Líderes Campesinas (California Organization of Farmworker Women Leaders), a group she founded in 1992, Treviño-Sauceda and her staff of 17 former farmworkers travel the state educating women about their rights. "We have been taught to serve," Treviño-

Sauceda says. "But we are smarter than society has made us believe that we are."

Last year, Treviño-Sauceda's group won a major victory after lobbying the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission to look into the case of Olivia Tamayo. A 46-year-old farmworker, Tamayo said a supervisor had sexually assaulted her repeatedly in the almond fields where she and her husband worked, but that her employer took no action against him when she com-

plained. (No criminal charges were filed, and the company, Harris Farms, contends it was a consensual affair and is appealing the decision.) Last year, a jury awarded Tamayo nearly \$1 million.

Next, Treviño-Sauceda—who raised her son Humberto, 25, on her own after her husband died 20 years ago—is developing an institute to teach farmworker women and girls to read and go to college. Says one civil rights lawyer who has worked with her: "She's dynamite." ●